

Jaishankar flags 'close up deployments'

They are to prevent encroachment of territory, says Beijing in a sharp reaction

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Continuing “close up deployments” and questions about whether China would “live up to its written commitments” on not deploying a large number of forces were two issues at the heart of the recent tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has said.

The Minister was speaking at the Qatar Economic Forum on Tuesday, where he was asked about the boundary situation. The Chinese Foreign Ministry on Wednesday reacted sharply to a question on his comments, telling reporters that China’s deployments were “aimed at preventing and responding to encroachment and threat on China’s territory by relevant country”.

The comments from both sides underlined the continuing tensions, and stalemate, along the LAC, with military-level talks failing to



make headway following an agreement to disengage at Pangong Lake in February. Talks on continuing stand-offs have been slow-moving, with unresolved issues in Depsang, Demchok, Gogra and Hot Springs areas in Ladakh.

Asked about what role the Quad – the informal India, U.S., Australia, Japan grouping – grouping could play in India’s response to the border situation, Mr. Jaishankar said, “I think when it comes to Quad and the India-China border issue, we’re talking apples and oranges. I’m not quite sure I’d really see a

tight connection.” While the Quad had “come together on a common agenda” that included maritime security, connectivity and even working on vaccines, the border issue, he said, “has pre-existed upon, in many ways, it’s a challenge, a problem, which is quite independent of the Quad”.

He said there were “two big issues”. “One of course is that the close up deployments still continue, especially in Ladakh. The issue there is whether China will live up to the written commitments which are made about both countries not de-

ploying a large armed force at the border. And the larger issue really, whether we can build this relationship on the basis of mutual sensitivity, mutual respect and mutual interest. So I do see why you’re interested in both the issues, but I would urge you to look at them, somewhat independent of each other,” he said.

In Beijing, China’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian told reporters, “China’s military deployment along the western section of the China-India border is a normal defence arrangement.” He said it was “aimed at preventing and responding to encroachment and threat on China’s territory by relevant country”.

“For a long time, the Indian side has been increasing its military deployment along the China-India border and encroaching on China’s territory,” he said, adding this was “the root cause of tension along the China-India border.”